

# Ship Shape

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Summary: Tuffnut and Snotlout. Best friends. They both realized that life on Berk was boring now that Dragon killing was no longer allowed. They want adventure, recognition. They want to be Someone who Matters. They hire on as deck hands for an infamous Trader/Pirate. A good way for a viking to be Someone. Adventure on the High Seas.

## 1. Chapter 1

How to Train your Dragon : Adventure on the High Seas.

Tuffnut stomped towards the harbour, after another round of arguments with his sister and then his mother berating him for fighting with his sister. He figured since Ruffnut was a girl, that she was given preferential treatment and treated differently. It wasn't fair, but his mother said, that she was training to be a good wife and fighting with her brother wasn't attractive to potential inlaws. Tuffnut snorted, he may have to negotiate soon, both he and his sister were nearly of age to marry.

He might have a few years yet, but Ruffnut wouldn't. She would need at least a years notice so that she could get her dowry together, and that would take away from her timeline of peak eligibility. Tuffnut shook his head, his mother was beginning to get to him, he was thinking about marriage and he hadn't even done anything more than help take down a giant dragon and train a Zippleback. He didn't have many other accomplishments that would make him a good candidate for marriage anyway.

To hear any of the village girls, he wasn't much in the way of looks either, even though Ruffnut was considered to be beautiful, like Astrid. He was too skinny, too lanky and gangly, his hair wasn't a respectable length, it was too long, too pale, and in the thoughts of one girl, too boring. Tuffnut reached the harbour, now in an even

darker mood.

Snotlout watched as Tuffnut descended the wooden scaffolds, and was a little entertained as the other boys face went from annoyed, to irritated, to downright angry at the world. He snorted and turned back to watching the new ship tacking into port. This ship was obviously foreign, the sails were twice the size of anything Berk had, the hull was made of a darker, heavier wood and it rode higher in the water than any snekka. It also sported several decks, and the highest look out platform Snotlout had ever seen.

It also had rather ornately carved railings and a deep red paint, marking it as a pirate ship. One of the further watch towers had witnessed the pirate flag being pulled down and the other flag run up. Stoic had called down a small company of warriors, should the ship be so dishonourable as to attack under a false flag.

Snotlout sighed, after Hiccup had redeemed himself by training a Nightfury, and mostly taking down the Red Death, he had been taken under his fathers tutelage. Hiccup was no longer an embarrassment and was in training to be the next Chief of Berk. Something his uncle had not quite promised to Snotlout, even going so far as to ask Snotlout for his reply to certain situations.

Snotlout was now forgotten about and would spend the rest of his days as a warrior with no chance at becoming a war hero or even getting dragon heads to adorn his dwelling, making him a desirable husband. He was superfluous, an extra that wasn't really needed anymore. The ship tacked in and dropped anchor, it was too large to come to the dock, and dropped a long boat with several men in it. Snotlout hefted his mace, he had been training after Firewyrms had gone to the Breeding Island and hadn't yet returned, it was odd, but even Horrocow hadn't returned to Fishlegs yet, so Snotlout thought that the females must prefer to stay with their eggs.

Tuffnut stopped and watched as the long boat pulled up to the dock and a wooden ladder was lowered. The men climbed out, an intelligent, slightly, demented, looking man was first up the ladder, followed by two nearly identical, and exotic looking, young men. Their slanted eyes gave them the look of both a clever fox and a sleepy cat, or a rather uninterested snake. The last man up the ladder was a giant, taller than Chief Stoic, with skin the colour of old tanned leather. He was also bald and shirtless, even though Berk was only just getting into spring.

It was still cold enough to freeze a yaks' balls off with a stray breeze. Tuffnut snorted at this thought, and wondered why no one was ever around when he had these sudden flashes of hilarious thought. He made it to Snotlout's side in time to see, the traders haul up a iron bound chest, and heave it to Stoic's feet. Stoic had eyed it like it was going to eat his feet, until Gobber cracked it open. Both men goggled at whatever was in the chest, before Stoic closed it and waved to the portsmen to begin supplying the ship. Tuffnut and Snotlout were pressed into service as porters, and were sent to fetch fresh water barrels and barrels of pickled vegetables. Fishlegs joined in to hear what news there was of the new arrivals and wasn't too surprised by their payment to Stoic.

Aboard the ship, with a barrel on one shoulder and a bag of meal in the other hand, Tuffnut was sent below decks to the storage. He

handed off his supplies to a weedy, ratty, looking man and a large round bellied man, who took the meal into the ships galley. He guessed they were the ships cooks, and shrugged before heading back up. He passed what looked to be the captains quarters, and stared. In one corner was a large bed, next to it was a storm desk, bolted to the floor, with a star map and a large collection of maps. Tuffnuts' curiosity overrode his self preservation and he went for the maps like a lodestone to metal. He was engrossed in reading the maps, that he didn't notice Snotlout enter and close the door behind him.

"What are you doing? If we get caught!" Snotlout said, quietly and a little afraid.

"Look, they've been past anything anyone from the archipelago has ever gotten to. Those guys are from further east and south than any Viking has ever been. Maybe they've even seen the edge of the earth itself." Tuffnut said, spreading out the largest map he could find. "Here we are, and here is where they're from. Can you read that? I can't. They've been everywhere! Look at that! What would have a skeleton like that?" Tuffnut said, excitedly, and bounded over to the gorgon skeleton on the wall. Snotlout was carefully rolling up the map and hissing at Tuffnut to be quiet.

"Man, we are going to get caught, and they won't be kind to us just cause we're young." Snotlout said, keeping Tuffnut from touching the skeleton. "Don't touch anything." he snapped in a whisper.

"Please don't, things like that are hard to come by." said a smooth, slightly mocking, voice from the doorway. Both young men froze in mid swing, and stared at the ships captain and first hand, in fear. "Relax, you aren't the first to go snooping through the maps and want to touch everything. We're not going to kill you for being curious." said the larger man. Both boys continued to stare in silence.

"You know, you could be a little friendlier." said the captain, with a grin at the larger man, who rolled his eyes.

"Me? Sinbad, you're worse than I am." he said with a grin. They quickly devolved into good natured sparring, providing the boys with an opportunity to escape.

Back on Berk, both boys sat in the great hall, going over what they had seen. Snotlout wasn't impressed, but confessed to liking the idea of an adventure. Tuffnut just wanted to go and keep going till the world turned him around and sent him back to Berk. Even if it took decades, he wanted to go and come back when he decided. They didn't notice Sinbad and his crew enter the hall, until someone asked for a story from their adventures. Tuffnut wanted to get closer to listen, but Snotlout showed an unusually cautious streak and kept him back.

Sinbad began his story with something about a book of great importance, and the machinations of a Goddess. Then a kingdom and an old friend of his. He went on, capturing the imagination of the younger crowd of Vikings, and Tuffnut. He was practically falling out of his chair to hear the story, and was enthralled, when the larger man took over for another story. He later learned that the large dark skinned man was named Roth and was from a place called Nubia. Roth told the story of how they defeated a giant sea monster called a kraken, how they had seen a fish the size of a whale, and small fish

that could fly for a league.

They had encountered sea dragons that ate kraken, an island of beautiful women that ate men alive. Sirens that tried to drown them, water that flowed upwards rather than down, a bird that brought the cold of deep winter wherever it flew, another giant bird that could eat things called elephants, and sea serpents, giant eels, that were smart enough to trick people into riding in their mouths to the bottom of the ocean to talk with mermaids. That was all Tuffnut could remember, he woke up in his own bed the next morning, Snotlout was sleeping on his floor. Tuffnut made his decision almost immediately, when he looked out his window and saw the large ship still anchored in the harbour. He woke Snotlout as he bounced from the chest of drawers to the hanging wardrobe, and then back to his bed. He grabbed his fathers shield and his own helmet. He grabbed a folded wad of white fabric and shoved it into his bag. Snotlout watched him for a few minutes.

"What do you think you're doing?" Snotlout asked with a yawn.

"I'm leaving Berk, on that ship!" Tuffnut stated, shouldered his bag and left the room, leaving Snotlout gaping. "If you want to go on an adventure, nows the time and this is probably your only chance before Hiccup becomes Chief and drives the Meatheads into extinction." Tuffnut shouted from downstairs. Snotlout sat in surprise, then bolted to his home. He caught up with Tuffnut before the other boy had gotten halfway to the harbour.

They were seen by Astrid and Ruffnut.

"Where are you going?" Ruffnut asked sarcastically. Astrid grinned.

"If you must know, we are going away. On that ship. We'll hire on as deck hands. Might not be glamorous, but at least it's better than rotting away on Berk, with nothing to do." Snotlout said, before Tuffnut could start an argument with Ruffnut.

"You're leaving?" Astrid asked appalled.

"On a ship?" Ruffnut said, with a curled lip. She wasn't fond of sailing.

"Yeah, take care of my half of our dragon, would you? He eats like he has a stomach of his own." Tuffnut said, straightening up, so that he was taller than the others, a fact he enjoyed but hardly employed whenever Fishlegs was around.

"If Firewyrn comes back, get her to take another rider. I doubt I'll be back in time to train her." Snotlout said, and both boys turned, leaving the girls staring after them.

"My mother, is going to have a conniption fit when she finds out about this." Ruffnut said quietly, she was still in shock and wasn't quite grasping the fact that her twin brother was willing leaving Berk, and her, behind.

The boys were laughing and joking as the walked onto the dock to confront Sinbad and ask to be hired on as deck hands. They didn't count on Stoic and his main advisors being there, which included

Spitelout, Snotlout's father.

"Oh no. My dad is here." Snotlout said weakly. "He won't want me to leave. And they'll probably call your mom down here too."

"Think we could stow away and hope they don't find us till it's too late?" Tuffnut asked hopefully.

"They've seen us. It's too late." Snotlout said, as Stoic and his father caught sight of them and headed over. "We're doomed."

"Was nice knowing you bud. Maybe they'll put us on the same boat and light us on fire at the same time." Tuffnut suggested, dropping his bag and waiting for punishment to be handed out.

"Well boys, ye look, packed. Why is that?" Stoic asked, waiting for an answer. Spitelout waited as well.

"Didn't they tell you last night?" Sinbad interrupted quickly. "They're my new deck hand and rigger. They hired on for a two year term." he added brightly, Roth stared at him for a moment.

"That's right. They stayed aboard a while yesterday and I gave them the idea. Looks like they accepted it." Roth said, taking both bags and heading for the ladder. "Say your good byes boys. You won't be seeing Berk for at least two years."

"Snotlout? You're leaving? What about Thawfest and the games?" Spitelout asked, it was the only thing he could think of besides using actual emotions to keep his only son on Berk.

"I think I'm a little too old to be participating in games now. Tuffnut and me, we want to do something worthwhile. We want to be somebody. And if that means leaving, then we'll leave." Snotlout said firmly.

"Yeah, we want adventure, a chance to prove that dragon killing wasn't the only thing we could have done. Riding dragons wasn't even our thing, Hiccup has that. We want to prove that we can do great things too. We just â€¦" Tuffnut trailed off, catching the look on Stoic's face.

"Need the chance to do it." Stoic said heavily. "I never gave Hiccup the chance he needed, he took it. So, we will miss having the both of you here. But we look forward to welcoming you back in two years. Take care of yourselves, and keep out of trouble."

"Hey, Chief? Since our dad's dead and all, and I'm leaving, would you step in and negotiate for Ruffnut if she gets married while I'm gone?" Tuffnut asked sheepishly.

"I would be honoured." Stoic said without a flicker of apprehension.

"You should be afraid." Tuffnut said with a snort, and with that, both boys jumped into the long boat and left Berk behind them.

Two weeks after leaving Berk, Snotlout and Tuffnut made an important discovery. Sailing was hard. Especially now that they were heading southeast, it was getting warmer than the Vikings had ever been, and they had no lighter clothes. Sinbad took pity on them and put into port a little earlier than planned. He also planned on taking them to learn a few things. Things they may not have learned on an island where everyone knew everyone else's business. A tavern and a brothel were on Sinbad's list of Things to do to New Recruits. The tavern was best done sooner, rather than later.

The boys were old enough to get drunk and suffer the consequences the next day. Sinbad hadn't planned on watching Lin and Jin get beaten at a drinking game. The Viking boys proved to be heavy weights at drinking, their bodies accustomed to watered ale since they were both twelve and straight ale and mead from sixteen to now. Roth had to drink them under the table and haul the four of them back to the Chimera.

Three weeks out and the boys learned another lesson, sailing was boring to a pair of boys who flew with dragons and defeated a giant red dragon. They were too far to go back and Sinbad promised that while it was few and far between, eventually, an adventure would come along. Tuffnut muttered something along the lines of being drowned would be more interesting than watching the sail swell. Rat, the head rigger, tied him up and dangled him over the side of the ship, only to have Tuffnut yell boring and haul himself back up.

It took two months of sailing, to get to Syracuse and to train Tuffnut and Snotlout in the basics of the language used there. Tuffnut learned quickly, Snotlout, learned only enough to get by. By the time they tacked into port in Syracuse, both boys were nearly fluent in Greek and the climbing port language that included words kidnapped from other languages.

Tuffnut was proving to be nearly invaluable, but Snotlout was losing interest in the adventure. Nothing exciting had happened. Putting into port and a brush with the lee of a hurricane wasn't all that interesting. He was beginning to think that shipping out was a bad idea, until Sinbad tossed a bag of coins to him and told Lin and Jin not to lose him or Tuffnut.

Snotlout was willing to recant everything he had ever thought of women, they weren't just interesting, they were amazing. He's never been to a bathhouse like that before, and the service, well, he'd wait to see if Tuffnut had the same goofy grin he had, before telling him what he had experienced. Tuffnut had wandered back to the ship, with a grinning Jin following him. Snotlout had to be dragged from the bathhouse, away from a young woman who he swore was his soul mate.

Lin regretted letting Snotlout try the local alcohol. It still knocked Sinbad on his ass, a young Viking with no previous experience with it, Snotlout handled it better than anyone expected, yet here he was claiming a prostitute was his soul mate and refusing to leave the bathhouse. Lin idly wondered just how serious Sinbad had been when he said not to lose the boys.

Snotlout was finally convinced to return to the Chimera, he could see the girl again, if he went willingly to the bathhouse during the day, when it was run strictly as a bathhouse. His curly haired blonde

attendant was there waiting. For the time being, they would get some sleep. Snotlout had fallen gracelessly into a bunk and snored until noon the next day.

The next morning was uneventful, except for the fact that Tuffnut almost got his head taken off for his blond hair, and then almost got it taken off again when he saw Carthaginian traders with their coarse curly hair in warrior braids. Tuffnut was immediately intrigued by the look and feel of the thin braids, and demanded them for himself. The man whose hair he had grabbed had almost swung his short curved sword out of surprise, when he lost a foot of height as Tuffnut yanked his hair down for a better look. Roth explained what Tuffnut wanted and the Carthaginian was happy to comply, after being suitably compensated of course.

By the time Snotlout staggered off the ship, Tuffnut had half his hair in braids a half-inch thick, and still had the rest. It would take six hours and twelve men working, to twist and braid Tuffnut's hair. Snotlout watched, and ran a hand through his hair, thick and black, with a curl to it that thwarted brushes and combs, until last night and a memory surfaced. The bathhouse served as a barbershop as well. Snotlout hauled Lin back to the bathhouse and had his hair trimmed short, like the Romans that were visiting as well.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Chapter Three Pomp and Circumstantial Evidence

Sinbad showed up in the late afternoon, with another man he seemed to be friends with. The other man, looking a little older than what he was, was introduced as Proteus, the next King of Syracuse. Tuffnut and Snotlout shrugged, Vikings didn't bend their knee for anyone but their own leaders. Roth smacked them both upside the head and told them to bow. Snotlout said it wasn't bending their knees.

Tuffnut pointed out that it exposed their necks, a sword could easily remove their heads as they bowed, and he still refused to bow. Proteus wasn't insulted, far from it, he was impressed at Tuffnut's conviction and praised it. Then put him in a headlock and promised to snap him like a twig if he was so disrespectful to his father, the King.

Tuffnut agreed to at least bow if he should ever meet the King, and Proteus released him. He had not once lost his easy grin, or affable air. Tuffnut was gasping for air after being let go. Sinbad laughed and clasped Proteus' arm, they spoke too rapidly for either young Viking to follow and then Proteus left with a wave.

"So, boys. How are your dancing skills?" Sinbad asked with a sly grin. Both boys groaned.

"Are we being punished for something?" Snotlout asked, he couldn't dance at all.

"No, aside from not bowing to the Crown Prince, you two have stayed out of trouble. Remarkable, from what I've heard about the Northern tribesmen." Roth said with a chuckle.

"I know, you weren't even as well behaved as these two. Usually,

we've bailed recruits out of jail at least twice, by now." Sinbad said.

"Somehow, my mother would find out if I was being unruly enough, and come hunt me down and kill me." Tuffnut said wryly. "She'd find a way to find me."

"My dad would do the same thing. An inkling of shame and I'd be dead." Snotlout added, both boys looked around, as if their families could suddenly appear. Sinbad and Roth laughed at them.

"Anyway, since you can't dance, you'll just have to be wallflowers for the night." Sinbad said with a laugh. "Let's get going. Marina is looking forward to meeting the new deckhands."

"You'd both better be respectful to her. She's the captain's wife." Roth said, with an ominous tone. Snotlout and Tuffnut nodded, they'd obey him faster than they would Sinbad, he was bigger and scarier. Neither would admit it, but he and Sinbad played the good and bad sides well.

Sinbad led the crew to a relatively large house, certainly much more grand and extravagant than what the Vikings had ever seen. The boys were awestruck, the marble and alabaster walls were painted with frescoes and images of plants and animals, geometric designs, and fantastic looking creatures. A horse with a horn on its head, an eagle with the body of a lion, a large bird with a tail of fire, a giant snake was painted on the ceiling, all along the edge of the star map that had been painted in lieu of another fresco.

Curtains of a filmy gauze fluttered and billowed in the evening breeze, heavier tapestries were hung on blank walls, Tuffnut caught a glimpse of serving girls ducking in and out from behind several, so he assumed there were doors behind them. He thought to go after one of the girls when she gave him a smile and disappeared behind a tapestry. Snotlout had the same idea, when another servant giggled at the sight of them. Snotlout actually tried to go after the girl, but Rat grabbed his shirt collar and kept him in line. Lin, Jin, Roth and Rat all chuckled.

"They are not for you, it is a quick way to lose your pay." Rat chuckled. "Serving girls either serve food, or babies. You may get what you want, but so does she. She'll have all your pay, for a baby that may not be yours." he advised quietly.

"You're one to talk Rat." said a female voice, it was smooth and cultured. "I'm training one of your pay drains." the change that came over the crew was immediate. Hats were removed in respect for the lady standing before them, bows were quickly sketched, and Rat was practically devouring the lady's hand as he kissed it.

"What's going on?" Tuffnut asked a little disgusted at Rat's display.

"Rat had to kidnap his own kid and Marina is keeping her here as a page." Lin said quietly, they used port talk, it was easier to use for simple conversation.

"She's training to take a position on ship, as Rat's second." Jin added softly.



"She wants to be a rigger?" Snotlout asked, he had seen Rat nearly fly from one end of the ship to the other, on a single rope tied off at the crow's nest where he made his own bunk. Rat only slept in the crew quarters when the weather was very inhospitable. "Can anyone do what Rat can?" Snotlout asked curiously. He was still a deck hand. Tuffnut was better at rigging, and he was still incapable of using the ropes the way Rat did.

"We'll find out. She's going to be joining us for a trip North and back here. If she does well enough, she'll stay on." Roth said, with a grin at the two boys grimaces. "The storage room you cleaned out, is where she'll sleep. Marina was very emphatic about that. A lady needs her own space." Roth grinned.

"We could have kept two months of supplies in there." Sinbad muttered, he had appeared and rescued Marina from Rat's profuse appreciation.

"We were using it for a weapons locker." Roth pointed out. "And we still could put her in your cabin. Close up some of that space with walls, and have even more space for storing supplies. Months worth." Roth added, Sinbad made a face, as Roth grinned at him.

"So, Sinbad. Where are the two new recruits?" Marina called, she had finished greeting the crew. "Are they from the far north?" she asked, after getting a good look at Snotlout and Tuffnut. Sinbad clapped both boys on the shoulders.

"Yep, they're doing great so far." Sinbad said, with an easy grin.

"Nothing interesting has happened, has it boys?" Marina asked sardonically.

"No! Nothing at all!" Tuffnut snarled, hands curled into claws, as his frustration rose. "All those stories and everything in his cabin, and the best we get is a hurricane. A dying hurricane.!" Tuffnut ranted, making Marina laugh.

Snotlout had been distracted by the arrival of another girl, this one wasn't especially pretty, or as entrancing as the girl he met in the bathhouse. But she carried herself with the dignity of a lady, and her black eyes fairly snapped with wit and intelligence. Her black hair was kept back by a heavily embroidered scarf, but her hair itself was trimmed up to her shoulders. She wore a green dress that trailed behind her, and had a shawl over it that could barely keep off the night air, it was so delicate. Snotlout's staring became apparent, and Marina glanced behind herself.

"Oh good, you're ready. If you will excuse us. We'll see you at the palace, promptly Sinbad." Marina said, a steely tone in her voice, the girl giggled.

"As soon as the crew is dressed properly, Marina." Sinbad said sweetly, and smiled.

"And put the vase back where you found it. It was a gift from my mother." Marina said as she left the room, Sinbad's grin fell off his face and he chuckled a small vase over his shoulder, a passing servant

deftly caught it and kept walking.

Snotlout and Tuffnut were taken to a bathing room.

"This is better than Wash Day back home." Tuffnut said as he grabbed a towel and headed for the other room where the bath took up the whole floor. Tuffnut and Snotlout had a quick, furious, water fight, but eventually, they settled the fight. Sinbad and Roth were fully expecting the boys to avoid wearing proper Syracuse finery, but neither seemed to mind the lighter, carefully tailored clothes. Snotlout said it was more comfortable than wearing furs and leather all the time. Both had taken well to the canvas and cotton clothing the rest of the crew wore.

The shoes had been difficult. Snotlout struggled with his laces, as they didn't wrap the way his boot laces did. Jin showed him how to tie them. Tuffnut just knotted his as close to the shoe as possible and still be able to tug them on and off at will. No amount of washing and fine clothes would fully turn Rat into a respectable man of Spanish descent. He traded out his faded and worn scarf for a new one, and was dressed in cotton robes, but he still looked as though he could go swinging through the ropes and rigging at the drop of a hat.

Lin and Jin were wearing ornately embroidered robes and looked every inch as exotic as their far Eastern heritage claimed. Roth was still bare from the waist up and wore only a scarlet wrap around his waist. He claimed that the colour was very important in his culture, but no one really seemed to believe him. Tuffnut and Snotlout fetched their fur vests and put them on. A little bit of their heritage would be represented at this gala.

They got to the palace and were shown to the grand ballroom, with Roth hissing last minute instructions to them. Things like, try not to insult anyone, don't stuff your face with food. Drink slowly, and think carefully. Not only were they part of Sinbad's crew, but everything they did reflected back on him and Marina. Number one among their orders, was not to discuss dragon taming at all. If the Roman ambassadors found out, then the Spartans would eventually. The boys would be hunted down for their knowledge, even if it was second hand and geared to Northern dragon breeds, it could still be valuable to the Spartans.

Tuffnut and Snotlout were presented to the King, who both later agreed that he would be what they thought Odin might look like with both his eyes. The King greeted them warmly and then was distracted by his council members. The boys shrugged and were allowed to go explore, with a crew member always in sight. Snotlout was corralled by Jin and dragged off to be shown around like a prize pony. Tuffnut headed straight to the buffet table. He had seen food that he didn't recognize.

Tuffnut worked his way down one side of the buffet table, he got halfway up the other side, before he started feeling full. He kept going, filling a plate with the sweet and delicious desserts he had come across. He caught sight of Marina's hand maid watching him as he shoved a tiny cake into his mouth. He grunted and kept moving, taking his plate and heading out to a large balcony.

The way the palace was built, made him dizzy, even though heights

didn't bother him. The construction was amazing, and most of it was down with stone. Vikings built two level home, three if necessary, and they always used wood. It was safer and easier to work with, even though house pets now included fire breathing, temperamental, flying lizards.

Tuffnut decided he wanted at least part of his own home to be made of white stone, and flowing curtains. It was relaxing and comfortable in the moist night air. And stone was a good insulator in Berk. He'd have to get hold of an architect or someone who knew how to build these houses. He also liked the look of the arched window frames. Square was boring, rectangular was too.

Tuffnut realized his plate was empty and headed back to the buffet. He swore up and down that he didn't do anything beyond lean on the table to pull his shoe on again. Snotlout turned around in time to see Tuffnut pulling his shoe back onto his foot, and then both he and the long table went crashing to the floor. The legs gave out under the opposite end and the table shoved itself under Tuffnut, planting him in the middle of a large heavily decorated cake.

To the last person, everyone turned and watched as Tuffnut flailed around, trying to get away from the disaster. He kept slipping on whipped cream and finally just sighed and lay there, waiting for rescue. Sinbad was trying desperately not to laugh, but was failing. A pair of servants helped Tuffnut up and Proteus himself took him to get cleaned up.

"I told the head cook, there was too much food for the table to hold. That poor boy is the victim, not the instigator." The King was heard saying, the next morning after he had the table examined for foul play. The wood had been over stressed by the sheer weight of the food, and platters, the weaker of the four legs had gone first and the Tuffnut had leaned on the opposite end, shoving the table a little off it's precarious center, it had swung back and collapsed, driving into Tuffnut and taking him down. If he had been on fire, they could have written it off as part of the evening's entertainment.

#### 4. Chapter 4

Tuffnut was still trying to wash out the smell of cream from his braids the morning after the gala, it was pervasive, and he didn't know how he was supposed to wash his hair while it was in the braids. He spoke to Roth, who simply ran a hand over his bald scalp and grinned. The Carthaginians had left on the dawn tide and Tuffnut had no one else to ask, so he shrugged and washed his hair normally.

Snotlout hadn't stopped laughing since the night before, and even the girl who was joining them would catch his eye and start giggling. Even the elder crew members would start laughing without any prompting, but for Tuffnut walking by. This lasted for days, and when one is confined to a ship, tempers rise quickly. At least until a storm hits.

Rat swung down from the crow's nest and landed on the bridge.

"A storm is coming. Looks big too. We might have to put down anchor."

Rat said to Sinbad, who gave him an amused look.

"Since when would we put down anchor for a storm? We've gone through hurricanes and typhoons. A storm won't capsize us." Sinbad said confidently. Rat let out a sound akin to a squeak.

"We've never gone through anything so bad with three new recruits." Roth pointed out with a grin at Rat, who was beginning to look faint.

"So that's why you wanna put down anchor. You're worried for Coral." Sinbad said with a rather big grin.

"When you have children, I hope they are all girls, then you will understand my worries." Rat muttered, as Sinbad let out a laugh.

"I'll send all three to the bilge pumps if it gets really bad. Those boys need to build muscle anyway." Sinbad said, still chuckling. "But we are going straight through the storm." Rat nodded in agreement. Everyone knew Sinbad took storms as a challenge and would sail through the worst of them with a grin on his face and the wheel spinning merrily behind him.

Having the younger set below decks during the storm would cut their chances of being swept overboard dramatically. Being knocked around by the pitching and yawing of the ship was much more preferable to Rat.

The storm boiled on the horizon, seeming to crawl across the sky. It was finally upon them before dark, and everyone was hard pressed to keep their hands on their work. The rain came in sheets, lightning flashed with abandon, thunder rolled, and the waves swelled to heights not seen in the Northern seas.

Tuffnut and Snotlout were awestruck when the first wave rolled across the deck, sweeping anything not battened down into the darkened water.

Coral swung down from her perch on the mizzen mast and pulled the rigging tight as Rat tied off her section of sail. She tied off the rope to the rail, and went to help with the other side when Rat tossed down the rope for tie off.

The ship lurched as a wave struck cross wise across the port side, and Coral lost her footing just as she grabbed the rope. She swung past Tuffnut and Snotlout, who had been tying off lifelines. Neither Rat nor Coral had lifelines, they were in the rigging too much for them to be practical.

Tuffnut and Snotlout both lunged for the trailing rope as Coral swung out over the roiling waves. Another wave struck, jerking the ship upright again, and Coral screamed when she swung just within reach of Tuffnut.

Snotlout pulled on the rope, bringing Coral in closer so Tuffnut could grab her. He caught her around the waist and then felt the deck fall away from his feet. He tightened his grip on Coral and heaved himself in the direction he thought the deck was in. He was right and his feet touched wood again. As soon as both teenagers could stand,

they joined Snotlout in hauling the line tight and tying it off.

A moment of silence passed, and the three were just getting over the shock, when another storm wave struck, sweeping all three into the rails. Coral was swept off the deck entirely.

A howl of anguish was heard from above, as Rat watched his only child get thrown into the sea. Tuffnut, in a moment of thoughtlessness, dove over the side of the ship and swam for where he had last seen Coral go under.

The water was cold, and dark. Lit only by the flashes of lightning from above. Coral knew how to swim, in sedate, lazy rivers and quiet little ponds. The fury of the sea whipped into a hurricane was beyond her limited ability. She struggled to surface, getting only a bare lungful of air, before being pulled under again, dragged deeper each time.

Black spots began to dance in front of her eyes, as she realized she wouldn't be able to reach the surface one more time. She felt something circle her waist and pull her upwards. Coral could barely move, but the wind and waves slapped water into her eyes and she began coughing, then felt something pull her short hair and she jerked her head, hearing a snap as she did so.

Tuffnut cursed in Norse, he had felt his dragon tooth necklace go loose as he and Coral were being pulled onto deck. He had already lost his old fur vest. It had ripped across the front panel on his right and the rest of it was torn off when he dove into the sea.

The necklace had been special in that the tooth had been from the dragon that had died killing his and Ruffnut's father. Tuffnut tumbled onto the deck and rolled away from Coral, so he could vomit up the seawater he had swallowed and cough to clear his lungs.

Eighteen hours of storm finally began to clear off. Sinbad had said that storms on the sea threw their worst as they died, as opposed to just fizzling out over land. Coral had been taken to the tiny closet that served as her room and put to bed. Without Marina, the crew elected Rat to take care of her, he had hemmed and hawed until Tuffnut finally stepped in.

He stripped Coral down to her underclothes and handed them to Rat, with a deadpan look. Rat was glaring at him suspiciously, until Snotlout explained about Ruffnut, the look intensified. Tuffnut rolled his eyes and turned Coral on her side, then noticed something. Caught in her hair was his dragon pendant. He had to tug it to get it loose.

Coral came to with a pained cry and swung at the offender viciously. Tuffnut crumpled to the floor, in a private world of pain. Snotlout burst into laughter, as Rat chuckled rather darkly at Tuffnut. Coral looked around blankly, then tugged her blankets to her chest and screamed at the top of her lungs. Snotlout was half carried out of the room and Rat tried to drag Tuffnut out, but the boy wasn't inclined to move anytime soon.

"Go on, I'll be fine. I was just surprised to wake up and have strange men hovering over me." Coral said with a sigh, not explaining

why her first reaction was to strike at the closest person to her. "Are you okay?" she asked after waiting for Tuffnut to uncurl from his position on the floor.

"I'll be fine. It's not the first time I've been hit there. I have a twin sister." Tuffnut said, through gritted teeth, he slumped onto the end of Coral's bunk and sighed as the pain faded. They sat in silence for a few minutes, until Coral finally got too curious.

"What is that you're holding?" Coral asked, as a small bit of ivory peeked out from between Tuffnut's fingers.

"It's a tooth." Tuffnut said simply.

"From what? It doesn't look like any cat or bear tooth I've ever seen." Coral said, holding out her hand, Tuffnut hesitated a moment, then thought that she couldn't possibly know where it came from.

"I got it from my mom. She got it from the dragon that killed my dad." Tuffnut said, then froze in realization. "I wasn't supposed to mention dragons."

"There are dragons where you are from?" Coral asked excitedly, Tuffnut looked at her like she was crazy.

"Yeah, we have dragons all over Berk and the other islands. They raids us for food sometimes." Tuffnut said, Coral begged him to tell about the raids and what he and the other younger Vikings did. Tuffnut told as much as he could without getting into how Hiccup had figured out that the dragons were actually good creatures.

"There's a travelling zoo that has the most beautiful dragons. I've never seen them, but the drawings are really well done. Rat, my father, said he'd take me to see the zoo when we got to Alexandria." Coral said offhandedly, as she tied a new cord of braided cotton strung with cowry shells, around Tuffnut's neck.

She had attached his dragon tooth to it and explained that a choker was more practical. A dangling necklace could catch on things, like her hair, or be used to strangle him. The choker would be against his skin and keep out of the way. He had added that it wouldn't drag in his food anymore, drawing a look of disgust from Coral, he had cackled at her look.

"A zoo with dragons, huh? I'll have to tell Snotlout. He loves watching dragons." Tuffnut commented, then yawned hugely and leaned against Coral's pillows. She had insisted on the big fluffy things and now he knew why. They were very comfortable. He ignored Coral's hiss of improper, and fell asleep.

Coral threw her hands up, with Tuffnut on the blankets on one side, and they being nailed to the wall on the other, she was trapped in her own bed. She'd either have to sleep in the few inches left, or rip the blankets. They turned out to be too strong for her to pull from the wall. Tuffnut was also twice her weight, and she couldn't move him. She sulked for what seemed like hours, but she wasn't sure, she fell asleep in the middle of her sulk.

## 5. Chapter 5

### Chapter Five Fight

Snotlout sat on a barrel on deck, carving wood into ship pins to replace the ones that had splintered or snapped during the storm. Jin had been showing him how to do it, but once the older man noticed Snotlout's skill in whittling, he left him alone to work. Rat came out of the hatch that led down to crew quarters, looking murderous. Snotlout guessed that Tuffnut had stolen Coral's pillows again and she could be heard earlier screaming something below decks.

Snotlout considered Coral for a few moments as he flexed his fingers, she was pretty, not gorgeous or even beautiful. Maybe when her breasts finally grew in she might be. Her eyes were as black as Rat's and had more depth to them than the ocean, especially when she was angry. Snotlout thought about pursuing her, if Tuffnut didn't want to. He was already trying to irritate her, so he may be trying to get her attention.

Coral walked by and handed Snotlout a bowl of sugared fruit pieces. A fruit called a lemon, without the sugar, they were horrendously sour. Coral put the sugar on them herself when he refused to drink the juice every two days, as ordered by Sinbad to prevent scurvy and all manner of normal illnesses, like a cold or worse, lung disease. Snotlout looked at the fruit and then at Coral in a new light. He decided to go after Coral.

Tuffnut took the cup of juice and drank it quickly. Coral gave him a grin when he grimaced, she walked off, and Tuffnut went back to his job, braiding rope from old, frayed rope. Kale had given him the task when he saw what Tuffnut could do with string. Tuffnut had shrugged and tied the string around Kale's thick wrist and the large man was still trying to untie the knots.

He couldn't safely slide a knife under the bit of string that wasn't knotted into a Gordian mess. Coral's sewing abilities were called into play and she simply pulled the string. It snapped easily, and Kale didn't have so much as a welt. Now Tuffnut was stuck braiding rope.

It was easier and more fun when he thought of being stuck helping Ruffnut braid her hair after every washday. Tuffnut looked up and saw Snotlout flirting outrageously with Coral, she grinned and shook her head at him and kept walking. Something lit on fire in Tuffnut's belly and he glowered at Snotlout, without knowing why.

He didn't realize he had tied the rope he was braiding, into a noose, until Li walked by and asked who he was planning on keelhauling. Tuffnut untied the rope and went back to braiding.

Coral was unaware of the boys interest. She had been sheltered in Marina's household, and in her family's tribe, she had never been approached by any of the young men. She sat in the sunshine, repairing clothes that had appeared out of nowhere, once the crew found out she could sew a straight, sturdy Lie.

Socks, a cloak, shirts, pants, and most disturbing, an unnamed, unclaimed, green, furry lump. Someone had found it stuck to the barnacles on the hull. Coral finally got to it and shook it out

cautiously. It was ratty and bare in places, and it was no longer useful as clothing in any manner, so she tossed it overboard, and picked up a length of blue cotton she was trying to turn into a skirt.

Several days later and everyone was glad when land was sighted. Snotlout and Tuffnut had gotten into a brawl over Coral, and no one who knew why they were fighting told Coral. She assumed it was cabin fever and dismissed her unwitting part in anything that had to do with the young Vikings.

She was now happily chatting with Li and Jin over the exotic zoo they were taking her too. Rat had opted out, Sinbad wanted his older crew members for a job. So, as the youngest of the old crew, Li and Jin were sent to baby-sit Coral, Tuffnut and Snotlout.

In the time leading up to the fight, Coral hadn't realized that she was playing one boy against the other. She did find out that they were trying to outdo each other and she didn't ask why. She even had them doing her chores in an effort to impress her.

It took Kale, the Rus cook and Sinbad all together to pry the boys apart, with Coral snatched up into the rigging by Rat. She had questioned Rat about what was going on and he evaded her questions. No one else would tell her, and the boys weren't speaking to her or each other.

Coral followed Jin as the boys lagged behind with Li to look at a metalworkers stall. She was thinking about what had happened aboard ship. And then felt as though she was pole axed.

"Jin, what was Tuff and Snotlout fighting over. And don't get all tongue tied either. Tell me." Coral ordered catching Jin off guard. "Was it because of me?"

"Rat'll kill me if I tell you." Jin said with a shrug.

"Then I am the cause of the fight?" Coral asked sadly, Jin was an easy mark.

"Yeah. There's a reason women aren't usually welcome as crew members." Jin said. "The boys were fighting over you. They've been trying to get your attention, and you've been leading them around by the nose." Jin added honestly, Coral looked stricken.

"I didn't mean to!" Coral protested. "I thought they were going through a bout of cabin fever."

"They're teenaged boys. The only thing they think about is food, and girls." Jin said wryly. Coral rolled her eyes, then caught sight of something interesting. Jin left off talking when he realized he was alone.

Coral ran her hands over the soft fur, marvelling at how smooth and warm it was. The golden and black spotted fur was beautiful and the trader was selling the whole skin. Coral was set to buy the spotted skin, when the trader, smelling a good sale, brought out his next fur. A tawny gold skin was stretched across the spotted one, Coral shook her head. It was too brown, and she was enamoured with the spotted fur. The trader hesitated for a moment and then brought out



his prized fur. A large black stripe on orange-brown fur was brought out of his trunk, Coral's eyes went wide and she grabbed the striped fur excitedly. The trader went on to haggle on a price for the spotted pelt, and Coral agreed to it, then he named a price for the striped skin.

Coral couldn't afford both, unless, she removed her earrings, made from a gemstone found only on her tribe's island, she offered the green stones to the trader and he accepted immediately, after he verified that the stones were emeralds. Li took the furs back to the ship, along with Snotlout's new sword and Tuffnut's new chain mail.

They had missed the zoo by a few days, it had moved further inland to avoid the incoming storm that had nearly killed Coral. It would be a year before the zoo returned and then they might have new animals. The teenagers were a little disappointed, until a call went up for warriors to show off their skills in a contest the next day.

First place would be an unusual prize. There was a class for beginners and amateurs, but neither Snotlout nor Tuffnut wanted to join those competitions. They wanted the expert class. Jin let them sign up and entered himself as well, so did Li, when he got over being worried about being killed. Unfortunately, there was no team division, so he and Jin may have to fight each other. The same could be said for the boys, who were still casting glares at each other. That night was spent in silence, no one was speaking to anyone else, to avoid setting off short tempers and big egos.

The whole crew turned up at the stadium to watch as the fighting began. Snotlout breezed through his qualifying rounds, most of his opponents used blunt weapons or spears, while he used a mace borrowed from Jhett, Sinbad's weapon smith. Tuffnut wasn't so easily defeated either, but he was harder pressed to win his rounds. He was up against more seasoned fighters, the man doing registration had mistaken his age and put him in with older warriors.

Tuffnut didn't complain, a Viking took what was thrown at him and turned it back on his opponent. He took a strike on the shoulder that would have dislocated a smaller man's, and shrugged it off, and swung his preferred spear, nearly removing his opponents head and winning his fight.

Snotlout was traded up to the same level Tuffnut was on, and took out a last qualifying opponent. Just as he was looking around for his next opponent, a bell rang. The official for the tournament stepped out and explained that the next day would be the semi-finals.

Li and Jin walked back to the crew, Li had lost to one of the qualifying fighters, and Jin was in the semi-finals. Tuffnut and Snotlout were studiously ignoring each other. Kale had warned them about fighting aboard ship, and they were doing as he said, scrubbing barnacles while the ship was still moving wasn't a chore either wanted.

Coral had watched and cheered with the crew at the stadium, and was proud of both boys, but she wasn't sure how to congratulate them without inciting another fight. She settled for helping the cook fix a great meal. At least neither boy could claim she did it for him.

She also sat with Rat and spoke in his language to avoid playing favourites. Coral sighed, it was wearying to try and avoid her friends.

She sat on her bunk and pulled out the furs she had bought in the port market. The striped one, she'd leave as it was and use it as a blanket, but the spotted one, she couldn't figure out what to do with it. She stared at it for a moment and then looked at her sewing kit. She had noticed that Tuffnut no longer wore his vest, then remembered that she had actually held it in her hands, that nasty lump of green fur she had tossed overboard was all that had been left of his vest.

Coral groaned, she had cost him his only warm clothing. The fur she had bought was large enough to make a vest Tuffnut could grow into. But the skin itself was thin and easily torn, it would need a lining. Coral sighed, she'd have to wait to have a new skirt, the cotton she had been working on was strong enough to be the lining. Coral then realized she'd have to get Tuffnut's measurements, but how to do it without giving Snotlout a reason to fight on board.

Tuffnut sat on a barrel, drinking a cup of hot tea. The cook had said it would help dull any remaining pain and help him sleep, so that he was better rested tomorrow. Snotlout was drinking the same thing. The crew avoided playing favourites, but Tuffnut had heard Li and Jin betting against himself, Snotlout, and Jin's own odds in the competition. At least the odds were square between all three of them. He glowered as Snotlout swaggered by, Coral was walking with him, holding a small book, a piece of charcoal, and a long strange string. Tuffnut wanted to strangle Snotlout with the string.

"Oh, Tuffnut, you come too. If I have to repair everyone's clothes, I should at least know their measurements. I have the rest of the crew, but the two of you." Coral called, a quick sneer flicked from Snotlout to Tuffnut, Coral was oblivious to it and led the boys to the bunk room.

She was brisk with the measuring tape, spending only as much time as necessary on each boy. She had to have Tuffnut kneel so she could measure his shoulders, Snotlout wasn't as tall. After a few minutes, Coral dismissed the boys, trying to keep a cool, unconcerned air about herself. They growled as they headed back up on deck, pushing and shoving to be first up the stairs.

\* \* \*

><p>(AN I finally found my vhs copy of Sinbad, Legend of the Seven Seas and have two corrections to make. First of all, Roth will now be called Kale and Lin is now Li. I hate having to make corrections.)<p>

## 6. Chapter 6

The next day dawned bright and clear. Except for Snotlout, he had snuck into the town and found himself a tavern. He was carried back to the Chimera, still drunk and complaining about being left behind. He was in no condition to fight in the competition, so it was only Tuffnut and Jin entering the stadium that afternoon.

Before leaving for the stadium, Tuffnut sat on his bunk, next to Snotlout's.

"Are you going to gloat and make fun of me?" Snotlout asked miserably.

"No. Why would I? You were the only real chance I had at a good fight. All those old guys I was up against, they were smart, but they aren't strong anymore. I should make fun of you for being stupid, but Hiccup has dibs on that for, like, ever." Tuffnut said with a shrug and a grin, Snotlout snorted, then groaned and held his head. "Too bad you were so jealous of my awesome fighting prowess. You would've liked cheering for me when I won." Tuffnut added with a crooked grin. Snotlout started laughing and groaning at the same time, making Tuffnut laugh at him.

"I thought you weren't going to make fun of me." Snotlout moaned.

"I wasn't. Not my fault you can't hold your humour or your ale." Tuffnut said, still grinning. "I gotta get going. I start early." Tuffnut said, standing up.

"Make sure you win. I wanna see what the prize is." Snotlout said, he watched Tuffnut leave, and couldn't help but feel like he was being left behind in more ways than the one that kept him in his bunk. Somehow, he knew Tuffnut would win the tournament and bring back both the prize, and Coral, as his own.

Tuffnut joined the others going to see the fights, and headed off. There was laughing and joking, Jin and Tuffnut were teased about winning or losing. Jin and Tuffnut went into the barracks holding the other fighters, and were equipped with dulled weapons.

There were to be no deaths, the fighter who had killed one of his opponents had been jailed for the entirety of the competition. Tuffnut accepted the spear, but refused the small shield in favour of his own. The weapons master looked at him like he was crazy but shrugged and handed Jin a spear of his own. Jin refused the shield entirely.

Jin was called up to fight first. Apparently, the city official didn't like Jin's people and wanted him washed out of the game quickly. Tuffnut glowered when the official turned away when Jin was presented as the winner for the first match. Match after match went by quickly. Professionals, hiding their abilities, had entered as ringers in the amateur section, and they were weeding out as many of the others as possible. Tuffnut's first match was against one of these ringers.

Tuffnut was in a bit of trouble. The man he was up against was an expert in weapons fighting, and Tuffnut couldn't get in close enough to try grappling with him. The blade on his spear was gone, he was bleeding from a cut over his right eye, and a shallow slice on his left bicep. The man was right handed, and concealing a sharp dagger in his armband. The dull sword in his right hand never left the form it was held in, so the older man had stamina, he wasn't a warrior with weekly training, the man was a mercenary with daily training, and an axe to grind it seemed.

Tuffnut didn't understand a word the man was saying, he wasn't using any dialect Tuffnut had learned yet. But Tuffnut could tell that these were throw down taunts, probably alluding to his mother's fidelity or his sister's character. Either way, Tuffnut didn't care, he didn't know what was being said, so it didn't matter. Tuffnut took hold of his spear near the middle, like he had seen Li and Jin do when they were sparring separately, and swung as hard as he could. His opponents sword bit into the wooden shaft and was carried away by the momentum Tuffnut had put into his swing.

Tuffnut brought his shield around to avoid the thrust dagger and unceremoniously head butted his opponent. Years of fighting with Ruffnut and the other boys on Berk paid off. Tuffnut knocked his opponent unconscious with one strike. The crowds roared with laughter and approval. The official wasn't amused in the slightest, the ringer was one of his personal hires and a cousin of his as well.

Tuffnut went back to the barracks and was surprised to see Jin packing his gear.

"What are you doing?" Tuffnut asked, suddenly surly.

"I've been paid to leave the competition. The city's head Official doesn't like my kind, so an official bribed me to leave with my skin intact." Jin said sourly.

"Just 'cause of where you're from? That's stupid." Tuffnut muttered.

"Better alive and paid, than dead and poor." Jin said false cheerfully, he put his bag over his shoulder. "I'll be watching from the stands. Fight hard, fight smart. I saw you use one of my moves with that spear of yours. A good fighter uses the whole world as his weapon." Jin said cryptically, Tuffnut looked at him like he was crazy.

"What does that even mean?" Tuffnut muttered to himself as Jin left the barracks. The notice of a drop out went to the announcer and Tuffnut could see from where he was, the glares the crew sent the city official.

Tuffnut waited more than an hour for his last semi-final match, and then won his match. The final four matches were to be held the next day, and Tuffnut was given an invitation to the grand house that the official lived in. He refused, and went back to the ship to relax with people he trusted.

He wasn't told about the intruder that crept aboard to incapacitate or kill him, to keep him from winning the tournament. Apparently the prize was worth killing under aged fighters for. Snotlout wasn't aboard ship that evening or most of the night, he showed up just before dawn and slept through most of the day, almost missing Tuffnut's final few matches.

Tuffnut wasn't sure how he was winning, but his opponents were devolving into cheating and fighting dirty. Time and again, Tuffnut knew what his opponent was going to do, simply because he moved the same way Ruffnut would have during one of their fights. Before he knew what had happened, Tuffnut was one of three finalists. Then the final fight was called, confusing the fighters. Were they to melee,

or team up two to one.

The fighters were called out to the sanded stadium floor, cages had been dragged into the arena, and Tuffnut realized that they were going to have to fight very large animals. He backed up, mostly to get room to dodge, should the animal come for him first. Two very large bears were released from the larger cages, and Tuffnut swore as the other warriors each took an animal and prepared to try and kill it. This was something to do in a team, not alone.

Any Viking knew better than to take on a bear alone, let alone two bears. A horrible, gurgling, scream cut through Tuffnut's mental deafness. One of the bears had killed the last of the hired ringers, and was now helping the other bear to kill the other fighter. That man went down without a sound, his head cleaved from his neck by one powerful swat from the bear he had been fighting with.

The bears sniffed the dead men, and left off further violence, becoming nearly docile, as they trundled towards the weapons rack Tuffnut had climbed to get out of their reach. Grunts and guttural growls were all Tuffnut could hear as he watched his death bringers wander around less than seven feet away from him.

Coral and Snotlout stood in their seats, watching in horror as the bears tried to shake a treed Tuffnut from the rack he was on. The racks were empty, proving that the city's governing body had planned to kill all the finalists, rather than pay the reward.

Snotlout cursed violently and jumped over the seats towards the guards, he body slammed one of them and took his pole axe. Snotlout jumped into the ring and swung the axe, it bit into the neck of one bear, it shrieked and fell, dead. Snotlout couldn't free the pole axe and the other bear was bearing down on him, so he ran. Tuffnut could only watch from his position on the rack, until a guard tumbled into the ring, shrieked and ran for the gates, leaving his pole axe on the ground.

Tuffnut grinned, recognizing opportunity. He jumped down, grabbed the axe and ran for the bear chasing Snotlout. It buried Snotlout in a hug and then let out a roar and fell, it too was dead. Snotlout pulled away from the bear, a long knife in his hand.

"I knew I could win." Snotlout said with a grin, Tuffnut laughed and helped Snotlout to his feet. "I killed two bears, by myself." Snotlout said proudly and raised his hands to the cheering crowd. The crowd suddenly went silent, catching both Tuffnut and Snotlout by surprise. An ominous growl came from the third cage, followed by a roar.

"Do they have a dragon in there?" Snotlout asked, fear rising quickly. The cage opened and an enormous feline charged out, both Tuffnut and Snotlout broke for the wall. Kale and Sinbad were there, trying to reach the boys. Tuffnut boosted Snotlout up, then turned and picked up his stolen pole axe.

The striped cat paced towards him slowly, it was the survivor of many such battles, and could guess with near human accuracy, as to what it's attacker was going to do. Tuffnut waited, he ignored Kale and Snotlout calling him to get out of the pit. He advanced, feinting at the cat and moving so that it wasn't able to corner him against the

wall. He could barely think for all the adrenaline pumping through his body. All he could do was keep the axe between himself and the cat.

All of a sudden the cat moved, zigzagging towards Tuffnut, and it leapt into a series of movements that would allow it to wrap its paws around Tuffnut's torso and bury its fangs in his neck. Tuffnut swung the pole axe and lodged the spear point of the higher blade into the cat's throat, killing it with one move. The stadium was silent for a few moments, then cheers erupted, beginning with the crew of the Chimera.

Tuffnut looked around, dazed. Men were pouring into the arena and were taking away the animals. Someone said something about skinning them. The half healed cut above Tuffnut's eye had reopened and bled sluggishly down his face, as dust and sweat mixed to form muddy little rivulets down his face and neck. He found himself swept up into a hug by Kale, slapped on the back by Sinbad, Snotlout, and the other crewmembers, and Coral, she was hanging back a little. He noticed that she was shredding the hem of her shirt, then pushed her way to him to dab at his cut with a worried and relieved look on her face.

The crew went quiet as the ruling council picked their way across the blood spattered sand. The lead man had a sour look on his face.

"Well, we have our winner, and a second place." said the man with a disgusted sneer. Sinbad stepped in before either Snotlout or Tuffnut could summon enough strength to bury the man over the slight to their honour. There was a rapid exchange of words, and the dangerous flash of a knife, before the councillors agreed to award a double prize, each would be awarded half of the original prize.

A gold collar was presented and carefully cut in half by a jeweller later on that evening. The worth of the necklace was determined to be a good small farm in the lush countryside. Neither Snotlout nor Tuffnut wanted a farm, so they traded their halves of the necklace for gold and silver trade money. Sinbad showed them to the treasury hold, a secret hold, between the crew quarters and the bilge deck. It was barely four feet, deck to ceiling, and was lined with barrels.

Every barrel had a name or two on it, and two were now sporting Snotlout and Tuffnut's names. There was a handful of copper and one or two pieces of silver in the bottom. Sinbad had explained that their help during the storm had saved more than three times that in repair costs. The copper had come from Rat, it was all he had still on board, and it was all he could do to thank them both for saving Coral's life. He had a stash of his own treasure and earnings in the crew's shared trove, hidden away on a small island.

Coral had a small trunk in the corner, along with a few gems and gold coins. Snotlout pointed this out, a little jealous that she had more than him and Tuffnut. Sinbad said that was all that was left from her mother's travels with the crew, and it was all there was of Coral's dowry, should she get married and stay aboard.

Snotlout shrugged, a woman needed a dowry for a good marriage. He put his sack of coins in the barrel with his name on it, as Tuffnut did

the same. They looked around a little, a suit of silvered armour was netted to the wall above Kale's barrels, and a golden horn was above the Rus cook's barrels. A fire blackened bow and a black cape was over Rat's now single barrel. The bays wondered at that for a little while, then left the treasury.

Kale called for the boys and showed them three rolls of fur. Two bearskins and a striped black and orange cat skin. The bear skins were Snotlout's, the holes from his strikes had been carefully sewn shut by whoever had skinned the animals. The cat skin, tiger, as the Rus called it, was in better condition, being younger than the bears, but still all the skins were beautiful.

They still required tanning, but both Tuffnut and Snotlout knew how to do that. Snotlout's father had taught both boys, before they were teenagers, how to tan skin with the fur still on it. For few days, there were racks on the deck, with the skins stretched out to dry. Snotlout used his furs as blankets, as did Tuffnut. Coral had offered to line the skins when she got her hands on enough fabric to cover all three.

Kale had explained that the boys had won what they had killed, the older warriors from before the official had taken over had thought both boys had demonstrated good battle moves and therefore deserved the skins of the animals, rather than the official getting them to bribe a new bride out of the senate. Coral made no mention of her tiger skin, or the leopard skin she was turning into a new vest for Tuffnut in thanks for saving her life.

## 7. Catch Up

A year had passed, without much notice by the boys or Coral. Snotlout had shot up to five feet and eleven inches tall, he was still putting on muscle and looked a little gangly until that happened. Tuffnut was a true Norse giant, he was now topping out at six feet four inches. His hair had been changed into six thick braids, the small braids being unmanageable for a young deck hand. Coral had blossomed into a beautiful young woman, but didn't seem to notice or have anyone notice. Her hair was a little longer, she was a little taller, though she was still unable to look over anyone's shoulders. Her curves had gotten more noticeable, but so had Rat's death threats.

Li had found a scorpion in his bedding, and caught Rat glaring at him before dragging a finger across his throat in a silent death threat. All Li had done was compliment Coral's cooking, after they had all ate Sinbad's attempt at cooking. Li had almost broken down and cried at the sight of the scorpion. Tuffnut and Snotlout both had grown out of their crush on Coral, and she was thankful for it.

But that did not exempt them from Rat's over protectiveness of Coral. Snotlout had received a dead venomous snake, with a promise of the next one being alive. Tuffnut found himself dangling from a rope, over shark infested waters, and Rat taking a knife to his shoulder and allowing a drop of blood to hit the water, driving the sharks into a frenzy.

Rat had extracted promises from both boys, to keep away from Coral. He was granted those promises, which eventually faded in their memories. Their interest faded to friendship, and soon the three were

nearly inseparable.

During the first year of serving aboard the Chimera, a fire had been set in the port of a pirates island. The crew had survived, and had rescued most of their own belongings. Tuffnut had his tiger skin, and his father's shield, Snotlout had one bearskin and his barrel of personal treasure. Coral had only her trunk of her mother's wealth and her two skins, one of which was near finished.

The Chimera was replaced with an even larger ship, bought from the Spaniards, and renamed the Manticore. Coral got an actual room on the new ship, and the boys shared a room with Li and Jin, all four being closer in age than the rest of the crew.

Adventure had been few and far between. The boys had won a mermaids treasure on their own. Snotlout had been kidnapped by slavers and freed all the people in his caravan when the head man told him he could take what he could pull in a hand cart. He had piled five men and seven women onto the hand cart and had hauled them to a town nearby, as the slavers had watched to make sure he didn't cheat.

Tuffnut found a trove of nymphs in danger from a town that was trying to run them out of their grove. The nymphs were dryads and were unable to leave the trees, the towns people wanted the wood from the trees. Oak trees were sacred in Norse religion.

Tuffnut promised to help, but ultimately, the grove was destroyed and the nymphs were lost. Tuffnut blamed himself for leaving to get the crew and leaving the nymphs without defence. He at least avenged the death of the innocent little creatures by burning the fallen trees and half the forest.

He was rewarded for his attempts and taking responsibility, by a larger creature of the same kind as the nymphs. Tuffnut was given the ability to see the living energy of people and creatures. He would be able to see trees that housed dryads and other places of magical origin.

Coral was a little unusual in that all she had done was free a minotaur from captivity in a maze, not unlike the one from thousands of years ago. Minotaur's were an established race, not myth or born from a woman laying with a bull. The old male minotaur could only thank Coral and go his own way to find his people. Coral was glad, many minotaurs would have kidnapped a young woman and used her in some sort of revenge for what mankind had done to their people.

Their travels had taken them over land and sea, into the lair of a hydra, and out of Tartarus again for the original crew, though thankfully without Eris poking in where she was not welcome. They had attended Proteus' coronation, when his father passed away from a heart attack one morning.

Marina and Sinbad welcomed a child into the world, when hurricane season forced them to put into port for an additional three months, after being at sea for most of the year. Marina refused to go to sea with a small child, after all, it was a dangerous life, and Proteus needed her as an ambassador for Thrace.



After all the adventures they had gone through, Snotlout figured they were nearly due for another one. He didn't think it would involve him and his inexistent diplomacy skills. He had continued to return to the bathhouse where he had his first experience with a woman. The girl he had thought he was in love with had always been available for him and would refuse other customers when he was spotted heading to the bathhouse.

\* \* \*

><p>A short chapter. I needed to get beyond the day to day happenings aboard ship. A year has passed. Snotlout is up for his chance at the spotlight, for a while at least.<p>

## 8. Chapter 8

Snotlout brought a small bracelet of braided brass and copper, it wasn't expensive or worth much, but the copper reminded him of the girl's hair. Catching red and yellow in the lamp light of the small room she took her clients in. She had refused this gift several times before, once Snotlout's command of her language got better, he found out she thought he was asking her to be his mistress.

He had explained that he wasn't married and that she wouldn't be such to him. He also found out that she was educated far beyond what a bathhouse whore should be. It took months of visits and a few books from other lands to bribe her into telling him her story.

Her father had married her mother in order to pay off his debts, and had exhausted every asset her mother had brought to her marriage. There was no love lost between either adult, her mother's only love had died in battle, leaving his wife and young daughter to her family. Her family was only concerned with status, and had pressed her into marriage again. To a man who seemed to be wealthy, even through his gambling debts and overindulgences.

Snotlout had snorted derisively, a man would either be forced to work off his debts, or be shipped off on a dinghy, to try and make his way somewhere else. His family didn't even have to go with him, they were as much the victims as those he owed restitution to. The girl, who he had learned was called Rutila, proof that her father had named her and had no imagination.

Rutila told Snotlout that her step father had driven her mother to her death by demanding she lay with his friends for money, or he would sell her to a brothel on the grounds that she was unfaithful. Her mother's parents refused to believe that a fine man would do something so despicable and accused her of lying. There was nowhere for her mother to turn and the stress ate at her, tearing away at her health and slowly killing her.

After her mother had died, her step father had turned on Rutila, demanding she supply him with a means to pay off his debts. Rutila, at twelve, just barely made the requirements to be a considered a woman, and after seeing what had happened to her mother, Rutila had run away, only to be found and brought back.

She had run again and again, until he had finally sold her to a brothel, and from there she was sent to the bathhouse to work. It had

been five years since she had been sold and still she hadn't heard from her grandparents. She assumed her step father had told them all kinds of outrageous stories about her.

Snotlout offered to take them a message if he could find out where they lived. Rutila took him to the top of the bathhouse and pointed inland to where it was obvious a richer type of people lived.

"That is where my grandparents live, Loutus. They have seen me in the street and have not recognized me. I doubt they would recognize even their own daughter now, they are so blinded by lies." Rutila said, using a nickname she had given Snotlout months ago, finding his name to be too hard to pronounce, so they had translated part of it.

Snotlout had felt sorry for Rutila after that and had gone to look at the house that belonged to her step father. He had gotten a glimpse of the older man, who had remarried a younger woman, hardly older than Rutila. He had found out that she was nearly a year older than he was, but didn't let it faze him.

He had told Rutila that he was shipping out the next morning, but he would try that night to get a message to her grandparents. He was standing outside, looking up at the finely built house and heard music from inside. He shouldered aside the manservant, and walked indoors.

He got a taste of what Kale must have felt, being the odd one out and the tallest, at the same time. Most of the men were pale and lean, though not from hard work or training of any kind and the women were sly eyed and fair. Snotlout stood firm and demanded to see the host of the party.

An old man and woman separated from a small knot of people and approached him warily. Snotlout looked down at them for a moment, then asked about their grand daughter. The couple gave him arch looks and tried to look wounded. They explained that their grand daughter had been murdered and he was a beast for bringing it up.

Snotlout tried to convince them that she had been sold to a brothel, but they refused to listen to them. He left, a pit of guilt in his stomach and a chip on his shoulder. He put his carefully taught skills of thieving and climbed a wall to an unlit room. He quickly cleared out anything valuable and shredded whatever parchment he could lay his hands on.

Snotlout headed down the hall to another room, this was the lady's room, and he found plenty of jewellery and gems to take. He also set the furniture on fire, so that by the time it was discovered, it would be too late to save anything in this room.

Snotlout planned a second stop before heading back down to the harbour. Rutila's step father had left his young wife at home, so he could go gamble away her dowry. Snotlout found the girl and, in theory, kidnapped her. She had a bag packed and refused to remain behind. She followed him to the bathhouse and she and Rutila both decided to escape with Snotlout.

Snotlout was at a loss for words, he had tried for years to get a girl with limited results, and had actually fought his best friend

over one. But now, here he was with two about to follow him into the unknown and he hadn't even tried to win them over with anything but kindness.

Rutila finished packing and joined Snotlout and Vitula outside the bathhouse. He paid for their passage on the Manticore, and was teased for his bringing two women onboard. Vitula turned out to be pregnant, but confided to Coral and Rutila that it was her lovers' child, not her husbands. She hadn't given him his right as her husband in the three months they were married.

Vitula was put ashore in Italy, where she quickly became a ladies maid and married a groom. Rutila however, remained aboard with Snotlout, and became the head of the galley, displacing the Rus cook indefinitely. Coral was glad to have another woman aboard, even if she was sleeping with Snotlout.

This was the status quo for three more years, everyone aboard the Manticore having forgot about the two year timeline for Snotlout and Tuffnut.

\* \* \*

><p>Okay, on to part two. This won't turn out to be very long, I don't think. Though there are some scenarios I would like to write without ruining my established timeline. I'd like some feedback please. Read and Review please.<p>

## 9. Chapter 9

Coral and Rutila became fast friends, they were able to talk endlessly, unless someone brought up the failed rivalry between the boys for Coral's attention. That would shut both women up and they would glare at the man stupid enough to mention it.

A few months after Rutila came onboard and was granted a room of her own, until Snotlout moved in with her. Coral heard about the Travelling zoo she had wanted to see years ago. It seemed that it was going to arrive at their next port of call after they did. Rutila agreed to go and convinced Snotlout to take her. Then meddled a little and bribed Tuffnut into coming too.

Rutlia saw the way Coral looked at him now that he was a man and not a bumbling teenager. She also didn't like being the only married woman aboard. Even if the marriage was only by talk, and Snotlout backed it up with his rather intimidating bulk. Tuffnut was handsome, Rutila thought, in a tall, lanky, way. She had seen plenty of that in her old home.

As the young women giggled over the handsome acrobats and animal trainers, Tuffnut realized that he was slightly jealous. He knew that Coral was loyal to Sinbad, and to the crew. She had nearly lost her life on more than one occasion when proving her loyalty. But seeing her moon over an unknown juggler, was beginning to irritate beyond anything he and Snotlout had gone through a couple years ago.

Snotlout didn't worry, partly because his ego didn't leave any room to doubt Rutila's feelings for him, and the fact that she had latched

onto his arm halfway through the acrobats show. She was trying to pull him away from Tuffnut and Coral, but he was glued to his seat, especially when the dragons were brought out.

They were beautiful, even by Norse standards. One had scarlet scales and a golden mane, with ivory talons and useless wings. The other had deep sapphire coloured scales that glistened like a fish's scales in the torch light. Both were long and sinuous, with tufted tails the same golden tone as their manes. Their tooth filled mouths reminded Tuffnut of the snarling tiger he had killed, and the mane was reminiscent of a lion they had seen sunning itself on an outcropping when they first arrived in the southern seas.

Li and Jin had come along and were awestruck. Tuffnut and Snotlout had taken years to realize that women held no interest for either man, by then, it was far too late to care why Jin was kissing Li after heaving him back on board after the younger man was swept overboard during a storm. After the storm, Tuffnut, obvious as a bear in a sweet shop, had asked the loaded question and got his answer.

Tuffnut had shrugged and told Snotlout, who made a face and asked without thinking, how they had sex. Tuffnut didn't want the answer, but Li being overly vindictive that day, had gone into great and intricate detail. Snotlout had nightmares for a month. Li and Jin had laughed each time he had woken up half the ship with his screams.

The dragons were sluggishly performing a dance that made Jin and Li cringe as the constant missteps and horrible choreography. Both wanted to get into the ring and show the handlers how to do the dance properly. Tuffnut and Snotlout almost had to tie them to their seats. Then both Vikings nearly flattened those ahead of them, when whips were used to corral the screaming female dragon.

Snotlout got to the female first and had her soothed by the time Tuffnut had gotten to the male and was showing necessary deference. The crowd watched in awe as both young men backed the dragons up to each other and had them practically wilting from the gentle touch. The female reared suddenly and Tuffnut reminded Snotlout not to order the dragon. No one likes an order. Snotlout gathered himself and had the female back under control in a few moments, just as the head man came into the ring.

He offered gold and a position on his crew if both men would agree to break in more dragons. Both Vikings said no, vehemently. When they left, the dragons followed them. The head man tried to bring the authorities against the whole crew, but was himself jailed for bringing illegal creatures into the country. He made bail, and threatened Coral and Rutila when the male part of the crew was in the town. Rutila and Coral had stayed aboard while Tuffnut and Snotlout had taken the dragons up the mountain to try and release them.

When they found out about the women being taken, both men mounted the dragons and burned the travelling circus to cinders, before confronting the head man. The headman demanded that both Vikings teach him how to break dragons in exchange for the women. They were about to agree, when a ruckus started in the holding pens. Animals began to stream past the small circle of wagons, followed by their handlers. The crew had come and were causing an uproar.

Tuffnut and Snotlout were surprised to see Rat drop down in front of the headman, fury in his eyes. He said something in his native language and sank a long skinning knife into the headman's chest. Coral and Rutila were found in an empty cage, both were very unhappy at being kidnapped so easily.

Rutila was heard griping about a missed opportunity and smacked Tuffnut upside the head. He hadn't wanted anything to do with Rutila, so he didn't understand what she meant. She gave him a long stare, then turned to look at Coral, as she was being fussed over by Rat. Tuffnut got that implication.

"I am not going to and get her from him. Do you not know what he did to the man that kidnapped the both of you?" Tuffnut hissed quietly at Rutila, she muttered something in greek and shoved him forward.

"Just tell her you're glad she's okay." Rutila snapped. "Rat won't be so mean to you if you act like you really care." Tuffnut didn't bother protesting, Rutila was an immovable object even Sinbad had trouble getting around. At least he did when she found out he was sick with a cold and still out in a rain storm.

Tuffnut waited until Rat had gone looking for something for Coral to drink, convinced that she would faint away if he didn't hover over her. Tuffnut sat down next to Coral on the port rail of the Manticore, and they sat in an awkward silence for a few minutes.

"Soâ€|" Tuffnut drawled, not sure where to begin.

"Er, thank you, again, I guess." Coral said hesitantly.

"You guess? Me and Lout came in, dragons flaming and you guess?" Tuffnut asked, with a grin.

"Yeah, I mean, you didn't save us. Kale's the one who opened the cage and chased off the guards. You were just the vanguard, buying them time to come get us." Coral said.

"No, that's backwards. I found the note and came after you, without back up, just me and Snotlout. That's all the lead guy wanted. He wanted us to teach him how to train the dragons in exchange for you and Rutila." Tuffnut explained archly, then caught Coral's grin.

"So you came to save us, with no thought to your own safety?" Coral asked, her grin even bigger. Tuffnut was trapped, and he couldn't think straight all of a sudden.

"Yeah, it was Snotlout's idea to use the dragons. I wanted to go in on foot. Keep them safe too." Tuffnut said, wondering what Rat would do if he kissed Coral right then and there. He would never find out, because Coral stood and walked away, thinking the conversation was over.

\* \* \*

><p>Review Please.<p>

## 10. Chapter 10

Tuffnut continuously found himself staring after Coral, or being unusually kind to her, and the grin he'd catch on Snotlout's face, or the look of knowing on Rutila's, was beginning to get on his nerves. But it didn't keep him from noticing how long Coral's hair was and how her hips swayed gently when she walked. She was nearly as good a rigger as Rat was within a couple years of joining the crew, and now Rat was letting her take more of his duties.

One calm, nearly breezeless, night, Coral swung down after the lamp lighting, and joined Tuffnut, she was grinning happily. It was the first week of her turn to do the lamp lighting. Tuffnut grinned back at her, privately liking how Coral looked exhilarated after performing her final duty for the night. Tuffnut held out half an apple, he had eaten the rest. She ate it gratefully.

"Is there any more of that honey mead those Vikings traded us?" Coral asked, she rather liked the taste of it, having a sweet tooth aboard a ship was difficult to indulge.

"Just the wine from the Italian who wanted safe passage. It's weak, but good." Tuffnut said with a shrug as Coral made a face. She had grown up drinking watered wine and fruit juices. She didn't mind good wine, but she preferred to have anything but.

Tuffnut filled a pair of cups with wine and handed Coral one. She curled her lip, but drank the wine.

"Ugh. Practically vinegar." Coral muttered, making Tuffnut snort. He found the wine delicious, having grown up on thick, heavy ales and meads. He didn't care for the Rus vodka, or much else from the Northern most parts of the continent. The liquors from Rat's home had an unusual flavour, but didn't burn on the way in or out. Wine was a happy medium, and he doubted he could ever get drunk on it. He and Snotlout could now drink Kale under the table, but only if they took turns.

Tuffnut and Coral sat on the rail in silence, they'd be coming back around the Aegean sea to Syracuse again, and he had heard Coral telling Rutila that she was thinking of staying in Syracuse with Marina. The adventure with the Minotaur was a little too much for her and she wanted to stay off the sea for a while. Tuffnut found that he didn't like that idea and was planning on changing Coral's mind, he didn't know how yet, but he was working on it.

Coral watched Tuffnut's face go from relaxed to scowling in the span of a few moments. She wondered what he was thinking. Sinbad had told the Viking men that they had been away from Berk for more than two years already. Both had shrugged and said he'd pay them for four years or something. Maybe Tuffnut wanted to go back to Berk to stay. Two and a half years was a long time to be away from home.

"What is Berk like?" Coral asked quietly, Tuffnut started and looked at her in confusion. "What's it matter? We're here, not there." Tuffnut said with a shrug and jutted his chin out, mostly to show off his little thatch of chin hair that he was growing just under his bottom lip. Coral snorted inelegantly, in amusement of the gesture.

"I mean, you've been away for a long time now. Do you remember what a typical day would have been like? What would you do?" Coral asked, sipping her wine, to hide a grin.

"I'd be woken up by my twin sister jumping on my bed and screaming like a banshee from Eire. Then we'd fight over what was for breakfast, my mother would make both of us help her cook, and then clean, then we'd be free for the rest of the day. Ruffnut would be called in after dark, girls aren't allowed out after dark unless they're with more girls and family, like brothers. We'd spend time in the training ring with Barf and Belch, our Hideous Zippleback. He'd let us fight over him for a while. After training, we'd all go our separate ways, usually me and Snot would go explore the rest of the island and try to figure out how Hiccup managed to shoot down a Night Fury. Basic stuff, nothing as exciting or interesting as sailing on the open sea." Tuffnut said, turning to lean on the rails and look out over the now flat ocean.

"We're becalmed, probably till morning. Come with me. I have something to give you. It's taken me forever to make, because you started growing and wouldn't stop for months. But now, I think you hit your full height." Coral said, she didn't like how wistful Tuffnut had sounded when he spoke of his dragon and his family. Both were very good reasons to return to Berk for good. "Remember that first storm? The one where I was nearly drowned?"

"Who could forget? I lost my old vest and nearly lost my dragon tooth." Tuffnut said, as he followed Coral to her little room. As big as it was, the Manticore was still a ship and space was limited. Thankfully, Rutila was quartered down below this deck, so that she and Snotlout couldn't be heard through the floor.

"You jumped in after me. And someone found your vest attached to the barnacles on the Chimera, before it was burned. I thought it was some kind of joke and tossed it overboard permanently. It was a day later I realized what the lump of nasty green fur was." Coral said, shuddering at the memory of the hideous thing. Tuffnut snorted at her. "Anyway, I was shopping not too long before the fire and came across a pair of skins. One was the tiger skin in my bed. The other was from a cat called a leopard. I couldn't make it and give it to you then without inciting a fight between you and Snotlout." Coral added with a grimace.

"Yeah, we grew out of that." Tuffnut drawled with a grin. They had discussed at length their childish actions. Coral was embarrassed of her actions from that time. "So, what did you want to show me?"

"Show you? No. I used that spotted skin to make you a vest to say thank you for saving my life so long ago. Like I said, it would've been done a lot sooner, but you started growing so quickly." Coral said, her cheeks turning dusky under her tan and natural olive skin tone. She pulled a heavy wooden trunk out from under her bunk and opened it.

Tuffnut was impressed with the new vest. The gold and black spotted fur had been carefully sewn so as not to ruin the symmetry of the spots, and the small wooden toggles were sewn into the lining, so that when they were latched, they disappeared under the fur. There

were pockets inside the vest and leather straps inside to hold knives and small tools.

"I used my father's vest as a guide. There's straps sewn to the skin to keep it from splitting at the weakest points. The lining can be ripped away to be used as bandages." Coral began to ramble.

"It's great. Thank you." Tuffnut said, he didn't miss the beaming smile on Coral's face. She was getting obvious in her liking him. He put the vest on and admired the fit, loose enough to allow ease of movement, and fitted well enough so that it wouldn't fall off. The toggles and loops fitted tight enough so that they wouldn't come loose in a storm.

Tuffnut tugged on the hem of the vest, Coral had made it in the manner of her father's people. The vest seemed a little too short, even though it was proper length for a Spaniard. He didn't mind, he wouldn't have to fight with a long hem in high wind.

"It fits you pretty well." Coral said, mentally taking new measurements of Tuffnut, and noting just how long his waist now seemed to be. She and everyone else on the ship knew what everyone else looked like without clothing. Injuries, baths invaded for a prank, torture, all of these brought some version of nudity. Rutila had her share, having been a bathhouse whore, and Coral had grown up on her island, naked till the day she began her womanly courses. Before now though, knowing just what a man looked like had never been appealing.

Tuffnut watched in silence as Coral circled him like a hawk. Eyeing the vest and him like she was already planning a new one. He sighed and her eyes shot to his and she blushed, confusing him.

"Something wrong?" Tuffnut asked in a low voice.

"No, just thinking that you'll need a new pair of deck shorts soon." Coral said, neatly avoiding Tuffnut's eyes as she busied herself with her sewing basket.

"Got a few extra in my bag." Tuffnut said dismissively, as he played with the fur vest, he wanted to try to kiss Coral, but aboard ship was a dangerous place with Rat nowhere to be found. He decided to wait until they made port.

Coral watched in confusion as Tuffnut shrugged slightly and then left her room without another word. She sighed, feeling ridiculous, of course a Viking wouldn't want a woman as small and thin as she was. There women were the equal of the men and sometimes the better. Tuffnut and Snotlout had told her about shield maidens and Valkyries. And then there were the stories about their gods and goddesses. Tuffnut and his sister Ruffnut were once considered to be a blessing from Freya and her twin brother Freyr. Both beautiful and blonde Viking gods. Coral herself was a bastard child, her mother was little more than a teenager when she convinced Rat that she was an adult.

Rat had believed her and hadn't been overly surprised to find that he would be a father. The birth of Coral had weakened her mother greatly, she hadn't lived to see Coral turn five. After Rat had returned all of three times in Coral's life, he had been greatly



disappointed in her uncle. He was going to sell Coral to traders as a slave. Rat had seriously wounded the other man and had taken Coral with him. She didn't know him as anything more than the man who had fathered her. Coral sighed again, she was depressing herself and getting lost in thought when she had things to get done.

Sinbad noticed it first. He watched as Tuffnut came up from below decks, lost in thought. Coral was on deck afterwards, looking disappointed. Kale hmphed and shook his head.

"You see it too?" Sinbad asked quietly.

"We may lose four crew members when we return to the northern seas." Kale observed. Snotlout had come up a few hours ago, a little frantic and excited. "We'll have to go north anyway. Snotlout intends to be married and settled in before his child is born."

"Yeah. Start plotting ports for that. We'll need to restock a few times." Sinbad said, looking at his maps. Tuffnut's ability to navigate had grown exponentially, if he didn't stay on Berk, Sinbad was considering making him navigator under Kale. Snotlout was already head oarsman and if the steering ever went, no one else was strong enough to pull the rudder for steering, since the only one larger was Kale and he was outmatched by a narrow margin in sheer strength.

They made port and were hustled back to Marina's villa. A party was in the works and she wanted her husband around long enough to make an impression on their son. Sinbad had to refuse to stay very long, he was returning Snotlout to Berk and had only a few months for the voyage. Marina considered this, as much as she loved the sea, her son was still too young to go on long voyages so far away. She sighed and allowed the journey. They would leave in a week, after a maintenance check and reselling the ship.

Tuffnut had cajoled Coral into showing him around the back lawns of Marina's villa. They had gotten to a long field with a gentle sloping incline, and studded with statuary and a water garden at the end of the field. Tuffnut trailed along quietly, as Coral chatted about the name and god each statue represented. He finally got fed up with waiting for her to tell him that she was staying in Syracuse.

"Are you staying or not?" Tuffnut demanded suddenly, startling Coral.

"Staying? Where?" Coral asked in confusion.

"Here in Syracuse. I heard you and Rutila talking about it." Tuffnut said, glowering at a statue of Eros.

"That was ages ago. I was exhausted after escaping the minotaur's labyrinth. Poor thing was so lonely in there. He should be with his herd by now." Coral said lightly, as she walked further ahead. Tuffnut followed her.

"So you're still going to sail with me, uh, us?" Tuffnut asked, hoping he had covered his slip quickly enough.

"Till the day I can't pull the ropes. Then I'll be a deck hand." Coral said with a grin.

Tuffnut stared down at her for a moment, then went in for a kiss. Coral froze for a moment, then leaned into the kiss. They kept kissing, not really taking care to notice their surroundings. Li and Jin had followed them, thinking something was up, and they knew that Rat was going to follow them as well. They had been waiting with ropes and a gag. Rat didn't see the trap he had walked into, and was made to watch his daughter kissing a man he didn't approve of. Of course, he didn't approve of any man, Li and Jin were still on his radar, he wasn't taking any chances with anyone.

Coral and Tuffnut didn't notice Li, Jin, and a bound and gagged Rat, disappear back towards the house. They were too engrossed in each other for the moment. After a while, they broke apart, both grinning.

"That would be a good argument against staying in Syracuse." Coral said breathlessly.

"Yeah, I know." Tuffnut said with a satisfied smirk, Coral gave him a light punch in the arm.

\* \* \*

><p>Sorry for the delay. Real Life got a bit too real for a little while. Please Read and Review<p>

## 11. Chapter 11

The Manticore set sail for the long trip North to Berk a couple weeks after the stop over in Syracuse. The Eastern dragons had been spotted several times, flying like ribbons close to the coastline. They didn't seem to be overly fond of the deep sea, even though both Li and Jin said that this kind of dragon was almost exclusively a fisher dragon. Tuffnut and Snotlout decided to try and lure the dragons to the Manticore somehow, they managed to fish up enough large fish to draw in the dragons.

Sinbad expressly forbid the dragons to stay aboard the ship, their combined weight drove the ship to ride so low in the water, that the lowest port holes were less than a foot above the waterline. He did allow them to use the ship as a rest stop when he found out that they could stay in the air as effortlessly as a fish in water, once they were high enough. He was also surprised by the giant pearls both dragons left aboard the ship whenever they went fishing.

Neither Snotlout or Tuffnut knew for sure that the pearls were eggs. They didn't explode like Berk dragon eggs, and just sat, gleaming pearlescent in the sunlight. Kale found an old eastern man in a remote port where they went for fresh water, and a trip to a midwife, so Rutila could more accurately predict when she would give birth to Snotlout's child.

The old man wanted one of the dragons as payment for his information. He said alive or dead didn't matter. The dragon would've perished anyway because he dealt in the black market for scales, blood, hair, whiskers, teeth, internal organs, and other things that made no sense to anyone but Jin and Li. They couldn't hurry the dragons away from the shack fast enough.

Sinbad seemed none the wiser when the dragons went below decks with their two eggs, and didn't seem to see that the ship stayed at it's proper level. He found out just how the dragons went into torpor, like lizards when it got too cold to stay awake. The dragons, named Ran and Shao by Li, were able to stay suspended in the enclosed hold indefinitely after reaching the colder western waters, and by the time the dragons were actually resting on the floor of the hold, Sinbad had the lowest portholes sealed over with waterproof blockages. They were out of the reach of late hurricanes by this time, though storms were still as dangerous as ever on the open ocean.

They put into port for the last time for the longest stretch of the journey and were resupplying, when Snotlout and Tuffnut saw someone they wish they hadn't met. Dagur, of the Berserker tribe of Vikings. He was just as tall and straight as ever, having reached his full growth, after taking the Chieftainship from his father several years ago and held onto it, even through attempts on his life, offers of alliance to Alvin the Treacherous, and many other attempts to overthrow him to keep the tribe from going on more raids than prudent.

Dagur hardly recognized Snotlout and didn't recall Tuffnut, until he made the connection between him and the Viking woman who had beaten the daylights out of him for stealing a kiss. Tuffnut laughed until his weak ale came out his nose, and Snotlout was trying to keep from laughing. Dagur didn't find it so funny and said his Viking honour would be restored when he took Tuffnut's head in place of Ruffnuts. That sobered Tuffnut up really quickly.

"You would kill me for what my sister did in retaliation for what you did?" Tuffnut asked archly, looking at Dagur like he was stupid, he was taller than the Berserker by a couple of inches and it was making Dagur angrier. "Are you really so obsessed with yourself, that you can't see how destructive you really are to your tribe?"

Dagur's response was to swing a fist at Tuffnut and then draw his sword to try and take his head off. Snotlout smashed his tankard over the head of one of Dagur's companions and waded into the fight before Tuffnut, unarmed and half drunk, got killed by Dagur. Coral, who up until now, had stayed hidden in the shadows next to Rat, was also ready to jump into the fight to save the man she planned on marrying, Tuffnut however, just didn't know it quite yet. Rat shoved her against the wall and held her there, women weren't welcome in a fight at these ports.

Dagur found himself in the middle of an all out brawl, and with no one directly challenging him, he had lost sight of both Snotlout and Tuffnut, but caught sight of one of there crew members. A small wiry looking man, with his back to the wall and someone even smaller behind him. A vicious, twisted grin worked it's way across his face when he realized that the person was a woman and that she was watching either of the two Berk Vikings. All he had to do was get past the man and she would make a good hostage.

Dagur slowly battled his way across the room, not once making direct eye contact with Rat or Coral, but keeping them in his field of vision. He finally made it within a sword stroke of Rat, only to find a long, lethal, skinning knife being held to where his throat would

be if he came within reach of Rat. Dagur feinted right, then left, only to keep being blocked by the smaller faster man and his knife. Dagur kept fighting, he was a consummate fighter, always fighting with or without opponents. He was young, had plenty of stamina and enough training to be more than effective against older more seasoned fighters. Rat was older than Dagur and could feel his strength ebbing little by little, the longer he held out against Dagur.

Dagur could tell that each time his sword was blocked by the smaller knife, the smaller man would wince and his shoulder would jerk spasmodically for just a moment. Rat was right handed and held his knife in that hand, his shoulder and elbow took the worst of the blows so his knife wouldn't snap under Dagur's sword. Then he noticed that Dagur was concentrating on his right side, so as to wear him out faster or break through his defence.

Rat was losing strenght faster now, his reaction time lessened significantly and no help in sight as the tavern brawl was concentrated in the middle of the room. Li and Jin were in the rafters, dropping down on anyone who was looking to jump their crew mates from behind, Kale was wrestling with three men and a fourth under his left arm, Sinbad was staying out of the fight, but was on the other side of the room, and the two Viking boys were buried in the middle of the melee with other crewmates and the Berserkeres. Rat and Coral were on their own.

Dagur swung a powerful downward stroke and succeeded in disarming Rat and dislocating his shoulder at the same time. Dagur went in for the kill as Rat let out a howl of pain as his arm was rendered useless. Coral shrieked as Dagur came forward and thrust his sword at her vulnerable father.

A small eating knife lodged itself in the inside of Dagur's forearm, making him growl and unceremoniously pull it out. He looked in the direction it had come from and saw Rutila, holding a second knife, and a small flask of a clear liquid. She grinned nastily at Dagur and twiddled the flask with two fingers, while looking at his arm pointedly.

Dagur decided to leave Coral for later and headed towards Rutila, who was grinning broadly now. This confused Dagur and made him even angrier. Then he felt the pain. His arm from the elbow down felt as though it was on fire and cold at the same time. His sword fell from his right hand as it started turning pale, then yellowing and then turned a sickening green. Dagur was in immense pain as the poison began to spread to the rest of his body, causing organ failure and internal bleeding. In moments, the poison had turned him into a skin bag of liquefied meat. He was dead less than five minutes after Rutila's poisoned blade had struck him.

Dagur's death had a nulling effect on the brawl, and the Berserker's just stared as what was left of Dagur began to melt through the floor. Every eye turned to Rutila, who had gone back to her trencher of stew as if nothing had happened. Snotlout was the next person to be eyed uneasily.

"What? It was Chimera venom. She told me about it months ago." Snotlout said defensively.

"Now that you know what it does to a man, will you ever cheat or cast

me aside?" Rutila asked with a wicked little smirk, everyone laughed as Snotlout just shrugged.

"Eh, we'll see." Snotlout said with a grin of his own.

\* \* \*

><p>I KILLED DAGUR! WAHAHAHAHAHA! I really didn't like that little jerk in Riders of Berk. He needed a case of dead really badly. Poison was the weapon of choice for women almost every where, especially in Ancient cities like Rome or in this case Syracuse.<p>

Rutila would've been taught this in the bathhouse as well as from her mother, as poison was primarily used by women in ancient times. Need a father or husband ead? Poison. Need a rival out of the way? Poison. Want another mans wife? Woo her and have her off her husband. Want something another woman has? Pretend to be friends and poison her.

Also, women were usually only seen, so they could spike a man's drink with poison and be gone before anyone knew what had happened. They were great assassins at the time.

Rutila's knowledge was commonplace for a prostitute. You never suffered more than two beatings or violent couplings from the same person. They were usually dead by the third time.

End  
file.